

April 6, 2010

Dear Parents:

We have been advised by the Henry County Health Department that pertussis (Whooping Cough) has been detected within the Henry County area. At this point, we have a confirmed case in our School Corporation and we wanted to make you aware of the situation.

Symptoms of pertussis usually begin 7-10 days following exposure, with the first signs being those of the common cold with a mild cough. After a week or two, the cough becomes worse and may occur more frequently during sleep. The cough is said to be paroxysmal (a series of five to ten coughs in a single breath) during this time and may end with a whooping sound. Vomiting may occur at the end of the coughing spell. We are sending the fact sheet (see reverse side) for pertussis home with your child, which we hope will provide you with information to assess your child for symptoms of pertussis.

Immunization normally prevents this disease. Sometimes pertussis will infect immunized children, but symptoms will usually be milder than in un-immunized infants. It is recommended you check the immunization status of all children in your family and make sure they are up-to-date for the DtaP vaccine. (Pertussis vaccine is not given to children seven years of age or older.) Pregnant women should also notify their physician if they feel exposure has occurred. Lastly, if your child has had a cough lasting more than 7 days, or currently has a severe cough, please notify your physician.

We are asking for your help in this matter. If your child experiences any of the symptoms of pertussis, please notify us at school. We have the duty to protect the health and safety of all students and staff within our school and corporation. If we suspect your child has any of these symptoms, we will notify you. You will be asked to come and pick up your child immediately. We ask that you keep your child home during treatment, which usually consists of at least 5 days of antibiotics.

All suspected cases of pertussis must be reported to the Indiana State Board of Health for follow up. Questions regarding pertussis can be directed to the Henry County Health Department or your family physician.

WHOOPING COUGH INFORMATION

Quick fact

What is pertussis?

Pertussis, also called whooping cough, is a contagious disease caused by bacteria. It occurs in children more often than in adults. But, adults with milder, undiagnosed symptoms can transmit the disease to infants and children.

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

Pertussis can be divided into 3 stages:

1. During the first stage, symptoms are similar to a cold: slight fever, sneezing, runny nose, dry cough, loss of appetite, and irritability.
2. During the second stage (about 1 to 2 weeks later), the cough becomes more intense. There may be short, intense coughing spells followed by a long gasp for air (this is when the “whoop” is heard). The coughing fits may be followed by vomiting, nose bleeds, or bluish color to the face.
3. During the third stage, the cough is less intense and less frequent, and appetite begins to increase. Eventually the cough stops, although this may take several months.

How is pertussis spread?

Usually, it is spread by contact with an infected person's nose or throat secretions. This can happen by touching an infected person's nose or throat drainage, or it can be spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

How is pertussis treated?

Antibiotics are given to make the illness less contagious, but do not reduce the symptoms unless given very early in illness.

How can pertussis be prevented?

Be sure that children are up to date on their shots, especially the diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (DtaP) series.